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C O N F I D E N T I A L PESHAWAR 000071

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TAGS: PTER PGOV MOPS PHUM PK
SUBJECT: NWFP: SWAT DEAL GOING OFF THE RAILS?

REF: ISLAMABAD 723

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM) leader Sufi Mohammad closed down his "peace camp" in Swat on April 9 to protest President Zardari's delay in signing the Nizam-e-Adl (Shari'a) Regulation. Sufi also announced, however, that "the peace deal with the government is intact." Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) elected officials continue to defend the agreement in public, but one key Awami National Party (ANP) provincial minister privately told the Consulate that the peace deal is a "failure." Except for Mingora and some isolated areas in the northern part of the district, militants appear to be firmly in control of Swat and intent on expanding their influence in neighboring districts (septel). Whether the signs of growing militant activity in areas around Swat in the wake of the peace deal will derail the agreement is unclear, but the further cementing of the militants' position in Swat creates an even deeper security hole for the government to dig out of in the NWFP. End Summary.

Sufi Pulls Up Peace Camp Stakes

¶2. (U) TNSM leader Sufi Mohammad announced April 9 that he was ending his "peace camp" in Swat. The camp was established in Swat after the February peace deal ostensibly to help ensure "security" in the Swat valley. Although a peaceful place for people to gather to voice concerns about the government, the camp served as a pressure point on the government. The TNSM leader maintained in his announcement that peace could not be restored without the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation coming into force, but was apparently not ready to declare the February peace deal dead, describing the agreement as "intact." The camp is reportedly being moved to Batkhela in Malakand District (approximately 40 km south of Mingora at the top of the Malakand Pass).

¶3. (U) Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP-Swat) spokesman Muslim Khan used the opportunity of Sufi's announcement to also condemn Zardari on April 9 for not signing the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation. Khan also stated that "if clashes between TTP and security forces

resume, [Zardari] will be responsible."

Government's Mixed Signals

¶4. (C) NWFP government officials continue to defend the peace agreement in public, even with the recent furor over a video clip of young woman being publicly beaten by local militants (reftel). Some elected provincial leaders have attempted to separate the peace agreement from the flogging and condemned the beating. Other politicians have simply maintained that the video clip was staged to undermine the peace deal. (Note: The facts behind the video clip have been muddied by the public firestorm of protest. A Consulate press contact based in Swat told post on April 8 that the incident took place shortly after the peace deal was announced. According to our press contact, the beating was retaliation after the girl's parents refused a marriage proposal from a local militant.)

¶5. (C) However, NWFP Law Minister Arshad Abdullah privately told post on April 9 that the peace deal is a "failure" and that the militants are in control in Swat. Abdullah was part of the initial group of NWFP provincial officials who worked out the agreement. "The militants are in control, and the government has no resources." The Law Minister complained that ISI had "pre-cooked" the agreement and the follow on engagement between the government and the militants with Sufi as mediator.

Swat "Lost" But Some Respite in Mingora

¶6. (C) A Swat resident who regularly visits Mingora commented on April 7 during a roundtable with Ambassador Holbrooke that Swat was "lost" to the militants but that some calm has returned to the city. The government, she said, is in "partial control" of Mingora and that girls of all ages had returned to school there. People, she continued, were exhausted by the violence that had preceded the peace agreement and were ready to grasp at any straw that would provide a small respite of quiet.

¶7. (C) She expressed deep skepticism about the military's ability to "protect the people" if the military renewed operations against local taliban. The military's use of heavy artillery that seemed to hit civilians more frequently than TTP targets and a deep mistrust of the military and ISI's motives and contact with TTP, she said, had severely damaged public confidence in the government's ability to respond effectively in Swat.

Comment

¶8. (C) Sufi's announcement of winding up the peace camp appears to be one more ploy to draw attention and pressure for Zardari's signature on the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation. For now, the TNSM leader seems likely to remain unwilling to declare the peace deal dead since the agreement is an important platform that gives him some voice and influence. The increasing signs of militant activity in districts adjacent to Swat (Malakand Division) that were also purportedly a part of the peace deal are more likely to end the agreement than Sufi's decision to pull up the peace camp's stakes in Swat.

TRACY